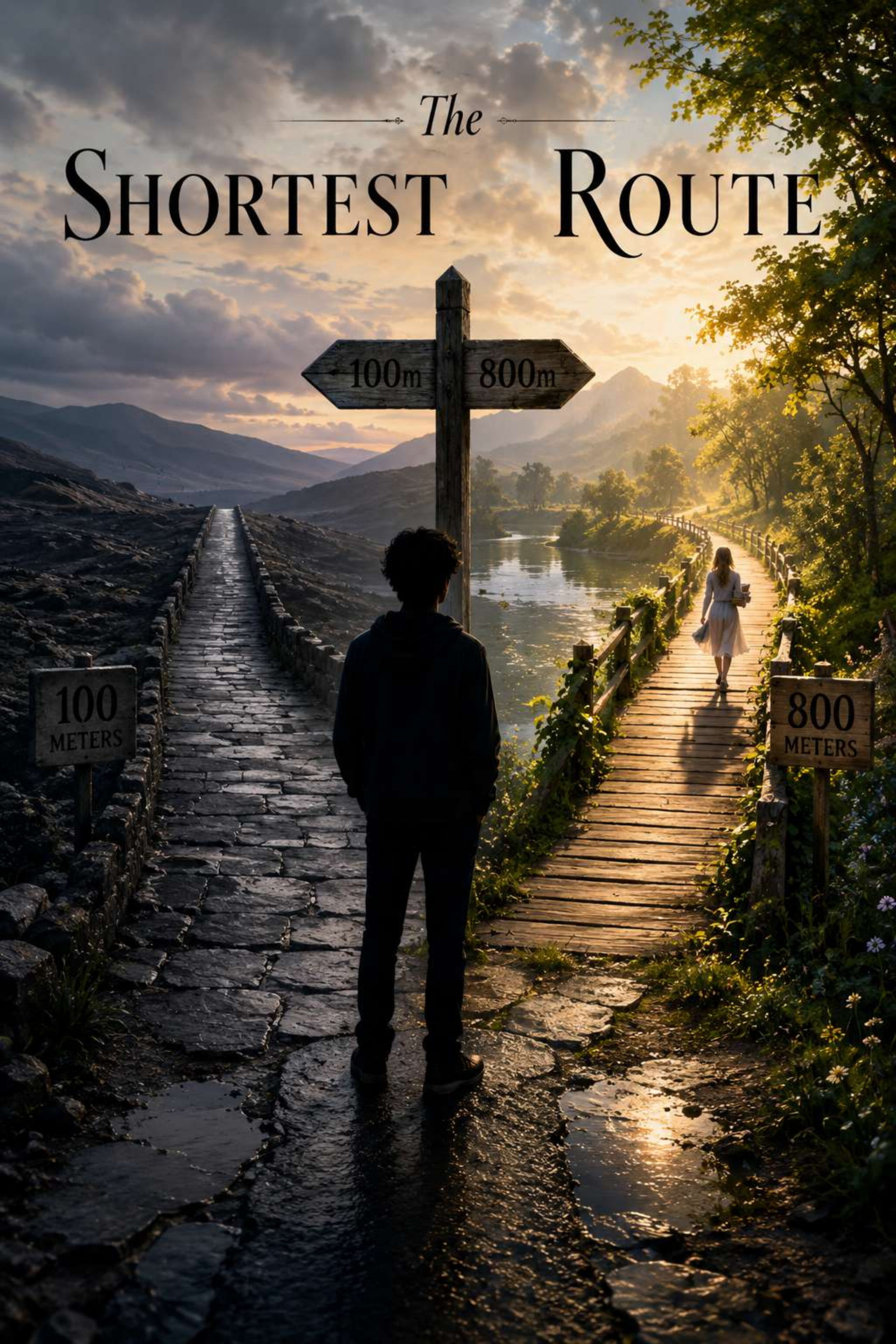
The Shortest Route



The mind seeks the shortest route to certainty.

Life quietly chooses the longest route to understanding.

The Shortest Route

Tes

— A novella —

The heaviest questions are rarely answered.

They are carried.

A Lifetime

In the land of Livealy, every life begins with a question. Some spend years searching for its answer. Others spend lifetimes becoming worthy of it. Through ordinary mornings, silent love, and the same familiar road walked again and again, one quiet boy slowly learns that peace is not found by reaching the end of the journey, but by the way one chooses to walk it.

The Question

If one thinks deeply enough about his own thoughts...

can he eventually become the answer he was always searching for?

I don't know.

For seventeen years,

I believed he could.

It never happened.

There is something strangely comforting about believing every question exists because somewhere, somehow, an answer already does.

It gives uncertainty a destination.

It gives suffering a purpose.

It allows tomorrow to feel slightly more hopeful than today.

Children believe that naturally.

Adults simply become better at pretending they still do.

I used to think life rewarded those who searched long enough.

Now...

I am no longer certain.

Perhaps some questions were never waiting for answers.

Perhaps they were quietly waiting for the person asking them

to become someone else.

Every morning, before leaving home, I found myself looking at the inside of my left wrist.

Not intentionally.

The eyes often develop habits long before the mind notices them.

Mine always arrived there first.

Above the words rested a single letter.

D.

Every person born in Livealy carried one.

No one knew where the letters came from.

No one knew why they never changed.

Unlike the question beneath them,

the letters remained forever.

Only the question disappeared.

Or so people believed.

Mine never had.

Neither had the letter.

Every morning...

the same two things greeted me.

D.

And beneath it...

the same unanswered question.

Hope is remarkably patient.

Especially when it has disguised itself as routine.

My mother used to notice me staring.

One morning she smiled.

"You'll wear it out one day."

I looked back at her, confused.

"It isn't made of paper."

"I know."

"Then how could I wear it out?"

She walked toward me before gently pressing a finger against my forehead.

"You won't wear out the words."

"You'll wear out yourself."

At ten years old,

I believed adults answered difficult questions because children were too young to understand them.

At seventeen,

I had begun suspecting something far less comforting.

Perhaps adults simply became accustomed to living beside questions that never left.

Perhaps growing older wasn't becoming wiser.

Perhaps it was becoming less surprised by uncertainty.

I never asked my mother what was written on her wrist.

No one did.

In Livealy, questions belonged only to the people carrying them.

Not because they were secret.

Because they were personal.

Like grief.

Like hope.

Everyone carried them differently.

Everyone understood that without needing it explained.

I suppose I should tell you about Livealy.

Not because it was extraordinary.

Because it wasn't.

People elsewhere imagine distant places as though distance itself creates wonder.

It doesn't.

Livealy had ordinary mornings.

Ordinary schools.

Ordinary universities.

Students still overslept.

Parents still worried.

Coffee still became cold before anyone remembered drinking it.

The rain still arrived precisely when nobody wanted it to.

Life remained wonderfully uninterested in becoming remarkable.

The only thing visitors would have found unusual...

was something we almost never thought about.

Every child entered the world carrying a question upon the inside of their left wrist.

Above it...

a single letter.

A.

B.

C.

D.

All the way to Z.

The letters meant nothing.

Or perhaps they meant everything.

Nobody knew.

People introduced themselves by them.

"I'm H."

"I'm L."

"I'm P."

Eventually, once conversation became comfortable, another sentence usually followed.

"I'm H.

The one who enjoys painting."

"I'm L.

The one who never wakes up on time."

"I'm P.

The one who keeps burning dinner."

Names existed.

Letters came first.

They always had.

Children invented stories about them.

Some believed every letter carried its own personality.

Others insisted certain letters were luckier than others.

Adults usually laughed.

Then admitted they had believed exactly the same thing when they were young.

Questions disappeared eventually.

Some vanished before their owners reached adulthood.

Others remained for decades.

Whenever someone noticed an empty wrist, neighbours smiled a little more warmly.

Families celebrated quietly.

No ceremonies.

No speeches.

Only relief.

As though someone had finally arrived home after wandering for a very long time.

I often wondered what that moment felt like.

Not when the question disappeared.

The moment before it.

Did people suddenly understand something?

Did the answer arrive all at once?

Or did they simply wake one ordinary morning,

look down,

and discover the words had quietly left while life carried on around them?

Mine remained.

Every birthday.

Every season.

Every year.

Unchanged.

When I was younger,

I believed answers belonged to intelligence.

Think hard enough.

Study long enough.

Become clever enough.

Eventually,

life rewards you.

No one tells children that life rarely resembles the stories created to comfort them.

Sometimes effort changes everything.

Sometimes...

it changes only the person making it.

At seventeen,

I had become remarkably good at asking questions.

Unfortunately,

questions have a habit of producing children.

Every answer seemed to give birth to two more.

I began noticing patterns where other people noticed coincidence.

Conversations.

Expressions.

Footsteps.

Silences.

The way people looked at someone they secretly admired.

The way sadness lingered half a second longer than smiles.

The way strangers slowly became familiar without either person realizing it.

My mind refused to believe anything happened without a reason.

Everything pointed toward something.

Everything meant something.

Surely...

my own question did too.

Every morning, I walked to the university by the shortest route.

Four minutes.

According to the sign.

Four minutes felt important then.

I believed life could be optimized.

Organized.

Reduced into better decisions.

Better habits.

Better routes.

If understanding existed somewhere...

why waste time taking the longer way?

I had not yet discovered...

that the things capable of changing us

rarely wait

where we expect to find them.

And somehow...

without realizing it...

I had already begun walking toward one of them.

Patterns

People often believe intelligence is measured by the number of answers a person possesses.

I have never been convinced.

Some of the wisest people I have ever met answered questions remarkably poorly.

My grandfather could never explain why he smiled whenever it rained.

My mother never understood why certain songs made her cry.

Neither of them seemed particularly interested in knowing.

They simply...

felt.

I envied that.

My mind rarely allowed anything to exist without first asking permission.

Every thought wanted another thought.

Every answer demanded another question.

Even silence refused to remain silent for very long.

Some people notice flowers.

I noticed the way people looked at them.

Some people listened to conversations.

I listened to pauses.

There is a difference.

Words tell us what people wish to say.

Silence usually reveals everything else.

I began noticing strange things.

The student who laughed the loudest always stopped smiling first.

The professor who spoke most confidently looked at the floor whenever someone asked about his family.

The old man selling newspapers greeted everyone differently depending on how tired they looked.

Children almost always chose the long way home.

Adults almost never did.

I wondered why.

Perhaps we are all born wandering...

and spend the rest of our lives learning to hurry.

The questions never stayed where they began.

One thought always became another.

If someone avoided eye contact...

were they shy?

Or guilty?

Or simply thinking about something else entirely?

If a stranger smiled...

was it kindness?

Habit?

Loneliness?

How could anyone ever know?

Most people seemed remarkably comfortable not knowing.

I wasn't.

There is a dangerous moment every curious mind eventually reaches.

The moment where it quietly begins believing...

that everything happens for a reason.

Coincidences become hidden messages.

Chance becomes probability.

Probability becomes certainty.

After that...

the world slowly transforms into a puzzle.

Every conversation becomes a clue.

Every delay becomes meaningful.

Every repeated number begins feeling intentional.

Reality itself starts resembling a language only you can hear.

I often wondered whether that language truly existed...

or whether my mind simply feared randomness too much to accept it.

Perhaps human beings were never designed to live comfortably beside uncertainty.

Perhaps pattern recognition was simply hope...

wearing the clothes of logic.

Sometimes I tested myself.

I would sit beneath the old oak tree outside the university and watch people pass.

Without hearing a single conversation...

I tried guessing who they were.

The exhausted boy carrying three books.

The woman checking her watch every few seconds.

The child dragging his shoes across the pavement.

I created entire lives for strangers.

Parents.

Dreams.

Arguments.

Regrets.

Then they disappeared around the corner.

Taking the truth with them.

I remained.

Still wondering.

I think that was the first time I realized something unsettling.

The human mind does not merely observe reality.

It completes it.

Give it half a story...

and it quietly invents the rest.

Perhaps that is why rumours spread so easily.

Why first impressions survive for years.

Why loneliness can transform strangers into companions...

without either person speaking a single word.

Looking back...

I don't think I was searching for answers anymore.

I was searching for certainty.

There is a difference.

Answers eventually end.

Certainty promises they never will.

That frightened me.

Not because I thought I was wrong.

Because somewhere...

I had begun suspecting my own mind was becoming better at creating patterns than discovering them.

I didn't know it then.

But one ordinary morning...

my mind was about to discover a pattern

it would spend years trying to understand.

Routine

Human beings become invisible remarkably quickly.

Not because they disappear.

Because they become expected.

The old man opening his bakery before sunrise.

The woman watering the flowers outside her house every morning.

The child who always ran despite never being late.

The professor who carried the same worn leather bag every day for three years.

We stop noticing them.

Not because they become less interesting.

Because routine quietly disguises itself as permanence.

Perhaps that is why absence always feels louder than presence.

It interrupts something we no longer realized we were carrying.

Every morning, I left home at precisely the same time.

Not because anyone expected me to.

Because yesterday had worked.

Yesterday usually becomes tomorrow more often than people notice.

The road toward the university curved gently around the eastern lake before joining the main street where students gradually gathered into quiet crowds.

By the second month of my first year...

I no longer looked at the road.

My feet already remembered it.

I wondered how many decisions eventually stop being decisions.

Breathing.

Walking.

Looking.

Living.

Perhaps routine is simply memory learning how to move without us.

There were familiar people along the way.

The old woman who sold flowers beside the bridge.

The twins who somehow argued every single morning.

A boy from the engineering department who always carried far more books than seemed physically possible.

The cyclist who ignored every traffic signal yet somehow never collided with anyone.

I never knew their names.

I didn't need to.

Recognition asks for remarkably little.

Then...

there was her.

At least...

I think there was.

The strange thing about memory is that it enjoys lying.

Looking back, I can no longer remember the first morning I saw her.

Only that there eventually stopped being mornings where I didn't.

She walked quietly.

Never hurried.

Never particularly slowly either.

As though she understood something about time

I hadn't yet learned.

Sometimes she carried books against her chest.

Sometimes only a single notebook.

Occasionally headphones.

Occasionally nothing at all.

She wasn't extraordinary.

At least...

not in any way the world usually celebrates.

If someone had asked me to describe her then,

I couldn't have.

Not honestly.

I knew almost nothing about her.

Only fragments.

The colour of her umbrella.

The way she paused before crossing the street even when no cars were coming.

The habit of brushing loose strands of hair behind her ear whenever the wind grew stronger.

The way she sometimes looked upward while walking,

as though the sky had interrupted whatever she had been thinking.

That was all.

Or perhaps...

that was already more than enough.

I noticed her the same way I noticed everyone else.

As another pattern.

Another familiar stranger quietly moving through the same ordinary mornings.

Nothing more.

That is what I told myself.

And for a while...

I believed it.

If our paths crossed, my eyes acknowledged another human being before continuing toward the university.

Nothing unusual.

Nothing meaningful.

Nothing worth remembering.

Then one morning,

without thinking,

I looked toward the place where she usually walked.

She wasn't there.

I continued walking.

Halfway to the university,

I stopped.

Not physically.

Somewhere inside myself.

A question had arrived before I realized I had asked it.

Where is she?

The thought surprised me.

Not because I cared.

Because I hadn't known

that I did.

The following morning,

she returned.

I noticed.

Then immediately became irritated with myself for noticing.

"Interesting."

I whispered.

Not because of her.

Because my own mind had quietly changed without asking my permission.

I told myself it was only pattern recognition.

Nothing more.

The brain expects repetition.

When repetition disappears, it notices.

That was all.

Surely.

I believed that explanation.

For exactly three days.

Z

It wasn't until several weeks later that I learned her letter.

Not intentionally.

In Livealy, introductions happened constantly.

Coffee shops.

Classrooms.

Libraries.

People smiled politely before saying the same familiar sentence.

"I'm K."

"I'm F."

"I'm N."

The letter always came first.

Everything else followed naturally.

Sometimes people added what they studied.

Sometimes what they enjoyed.

Sometimes nothing at all.

The letters were enough.

One afternoon, while waiting outside the university library, I overheard two girls calling toward someone further ahead.

"Z."

She turned.

One of them laughed before catching up beside her.

The conversation disappeared into the afternoon.

Mine didn't.

Z.

For reasons I still struggle to explain...

the letter stayed with me longer than it should have.

It wasn't unusual.

Someone had to be Z.

The alphabet always ended somewhere.

Still...

I found myself repeating it silently during the walk home.

D.

...

Z.

Four letters from the beginning.

One from the end.

Strange.

The thought amused me more than it interested me.

At least...

that was what I believed.

The following morning, I noticed something I wished I hadn't.

Before looking toward the place where she usually walked...

my eyes looked toward my own wrist.

D.

Then...

toward her.

Z.

I laughed quietly to myself.

Human beings have a remarkable talent for inventing meaning where none exists.

Letters are only letters.

Nothing more.

Children believed otherwise.

I remembered one conversation from primary school.

"They say Ms understand Ns better."

"No they don't."

"My brother told me."

"Your brother also thinks the moon follows him."

The entire classroom had laughed.

Even the teacher.

Adults often smiled whenever children discussed the letters.

Not because they knew the truth.

Because they didn't.

Nobody did.

By the time we grew older, most people stopped thinking about them altogether.

I hadn't.

Not anymore.

Somehow...

D and Z had begun occupying the same thought.

I disliked that.

The mind enjoys creating connections.

It cares remarkably little whether those connections deserve to exist.

I reminded myself of that repeatedly.

There were twenty-six letters.

Eventually...

someone was always going to become a Z.

It happened by chance.

Nothing more.

Yet each morning...

before leaving home...

my eyes still visited my wrist.

D.

Then quietly searched the familiar road.

For **Z.**

Perhaps coincidence becomes dangerous...

the moment routine begins expecting it.

I still believed I was observing a pattern.

I had not yet realized... the pattern had
quietly begun observing me.

Recognition

Three months passed quietly.

Not because nothing happened.

Because the same things kept happening.

Morning arrived.

People hurried.

Lectures began.

Coffee grew cold.

The rain interrupted plans nobody remembered making.

Life repeated itself so faithfully that weeks quietly disguised themselves as days.

I kept taking the same road.

She did too.

Sometimes we crossed paths.

Sometimes we walked on opposite sides of the street.

Sometimes an entire morning passed without either of us appearing in the other's direction.

Nothing remarkable ever happened.

Perhaps that was exactly why I remembered it so clearly.

Recognition is a strange thing.

It asks almost nothing from us.

The old man who sweeps the same pavement every morning probably recognizes me.

The woman working at the bakery near the eastern bridge probably does too.

Not by name.

Simply as...

"That boy."

Likewise,

I recognized them.

Without introductions.

Without memories.

Without ever becoming part of one another's lives.

Human beings become familiar

long before they become important.

I wondered if she recognized me the same way.

Not as D.

Not as the quiet boy who always thought too much.

Simply...

the boy who walked this road every morning.

The thought comforted me more than it should have.

Not because I wished to be remembered.

Because I realized

I already was.

At least...

a little.

There were mornings when our eyes met briefly before continuing on their separate journeys.

Neither of us smiled.

Neither of us looked away awkwardly.

It was simply the silent acknowledgement people offer familiar strangers.

I've seen you before.

Nothing more.

I convinced myself that was all it meant.

The mind has an unfortunate habit.

It rarely believes itself.

One morning,

while walking toward the university,

I found myself wondering something embarrassingly specific.

If I stopped taking this road...

how long would it take before she noticed?

I immediately disliked the question.

Not because it lacked an answer.

Because it shouldn't have existed.

She had no reason to notice.

Just as I had no reason to wonder.

Still...

the thought remained.

Perhaps recognition is measured differently by every person.

Some people disappear for years before anyone asks where they went.

Others miss one ordinary morning...

and quietly become the absence someone cannot explain.

I hoped,

quite irrationally, that I belonged somewhere between the two.

Then I laughed.

The old woman selling flowers had once disappeared for nearly a week.

When she returned,

I felt relieved.

Not because we knew each other.

Because something familiar had returned to its place.

Perhaps...

I wasn't wondering whether she would miss me.

Perhaps I was only wondering whether I had quietly become part of her routine the way she had become part of mine.

There is a difference.

Or at least...

I desperately wanted there to be.

The frightening thing about routine

is that it never asks permission before becoming attachment.

One ordinary morning, you simply realize your eyes have learned where to look.

By then...

it is already too late.

Looking back,

I don't think I was searching for her.

Not consciously.

My mornings had simply begun expecting the world to look a certain way.

And somehow...

without either of us speaking a single word...

she had quietly become part of that picture.

Why?

There is a peculiar arrogance hidden inside the human mind.

It refuses to accept mystery.

Everything must belong somewhere.

Every effect demands a cause.

Every feeling insists upon an explanation.

Mine was no different.

I could not simply accept that one ordinary stranger had quietly become part of my mornings.

There had to be a reason.

So...

I began searching.

Perhaps...

it was beauty.

That seemed reasonable enough.

People had admired beautiful faces for centuries.

Entire poems had been written because someone happened to smile in the right light.

Surely...

I was no different.

The explanation survived exactly one afternoon.

While leaving the university, I noticed another girl.

She was beautiful.

Objectively.

Symmetrical features.

Confident posture.

The sort of person conversations naturally turned toward.

I looked at her for perhaps two seconds.

Then kept walking.

The following morning...

I couldn't even remember her face.

Beauty,

it seemed, was capable of attracting attention.

Not permanence.

Perhaps...

it was familiarity.

That sounded more convincing.

After all,

I had spent months walking the same road.

Routine creates strange attachments.

People grow fond of cafés they never truly liked.

Songs they once ignored.

Old jackets they should have thrown away years earlier.

Perhaps she had simply become another habit.

I liked that explanation.

It felt safe.

Then the semester changed.

My lectures moved to another building.

For nearly two weeks,

I no longer used that road.

Logically...

the habit should have disappeared.

It didn't.

I found myself wondering whether she still walked there every morning.

Habit,

I realized,

rarely survives without repetition.

Somehow...

this had.

Perhaps...

I was lonely.

That possibility stayed with me longer than the others.

Loneliness is remarkably creative.

It has introduced people to companions who never existed.

Perhaps I had merely chosen the nearest stranger and quietly built an entire emotional world around her.

The thought disturbed me enough that I almost accepted it.

Almost.

Then I remembered something.

I had been lonely long before I met her.

Yet somehow...

out of the thousands of strangers I had passed,

only one remained.

Why?

The question returned.

More patiently this time.

I began watching myself instead of watching her.

Whenever she appeared,

what changed?

My breathing?

No.

My thoughts?

Not immediately.

My pace?

No.

Nothing obvious.

Only...

a peculiar kind of quietness.

For reasons I could not explain,

my mind argued less with itself whenever she was nearby.

The questions didn't disappear.

They simply...

became less urgent.

As though some part of me had temporarily forgotten it was searching for answers.

That frightened me.

Not because of what it meant.

Because I couldn't explain it.

I tried reducing it into psychology.

Projection.

Association.

Emotional dependence.

Familiarity.

The words sounded intelligent.

None of them felt true.

Language has an unfortunate habit.

Sometimes...

it describes things

without ever explaining them.

One evening,

I stood before the mirror longer than usual.

"Why her?"

I asked aloud.

The reflection remained remarkably unhelpful.

I laughed.

Not because the question was amusing.

Because I suddenly realized I had become the sort of person who expected mirrors to answer philosophical questions.

Perhaps I was thinking too much.

That seemed likely.

Then another thought arrived.

One far quieter than the others.

What if...

the question itself was wrong?

I had spent months asking,

"Why her?"

as though she were the mystery.

Perhaps...

she wasn't.

Perhaps the real mystery was something far less comfortable.

Why had my own heart

noticed someone

long before

my mind

had noticed itself looking?

That question...

refused to leave.

Looking back,

I think that was the first moment

I stopped investigating

her.

And quietly...

began investigating

myself.

Distance

Distance is a peculiar thing.

Most people measure it in metres.

Or kilometres.

Sometimes years.

I have never been convinced those are the distances that matter most.

Every morning, we walked less than twenty steps from one another.

Sometimes fewer.

Close enough to recognize each other's faces.

Far enough to remain complete strangers.

The university was full of people like that.

The boy who always slept in the back row.

The girl who never removed her headphones.

The professor who carried coffee but never seemed to drink it.

Lives brushing quietly against one another

without ever truly touching.

Perhaps...

that is how most human beings exist.

Not together.

Merely nearby.

One morning, our eyes met for slightly longer than usual.

Perhaps two seconds.

Perhaps less.

She continued walking.

So did I.

Nothing happened.

Yet somehow, the moment remained with me long after the morning itself had disappeared.

I wondered why.

Surely, she recognized me by now.

Not because I was remarkable.

Because I was repeated.

The human mind notices repetition long before it remembers names.

If someone walks past your window every morning,

eventually,

they stop becoming a stranger.

They become...

the person who walks past your window.

Nothing more.

I imagined that was who I had become.

The quiet boy on the morning road.

There was something strangely comforting about that.

Not because I wished to matter.

Because I realized I no longer existed entirely unnoticed.

At least...

not to everyone.

The thought stayed with me for several days.

Then another arrived.

One far less comforting.

What if...

that was all I would ever be?

The quiet boy.

Not D.

Not someone with questions.

Not someone who spent entire evenings arguing with his own thoughts.

Just... another familiar face passing through someone else's ordinary morning.

The realization should have saddened me.

Instead... it fascinated me.

How many people had quietly become part of my life without ever knowing they had entered it?

The florist near the bridge.

The old man feeding birds beside the lake.

The child who always tried to step only on the white stones.

Did they know they had become small chapters inside someone else's existence?

Probably not.

Perhaps... none of us ever do.

We move through the lives of strangers leaving fingerprints we never stay long enough to see.

That thought changed something inside me.

For the first time,

I stopped wondering whether she knew me.

Instead, I wondered how many people

I had unknowingly become to someone else.

Perhaps, to the old woman selling flowers,

I was simply the boy who always looked tired.

To the librarian,

the student who borrowed too many philosophy books.

To the man selling coffee,

the customer who always forgot to add sugar.

Entire versions of myself existed inside other people.

None of them were wrong.

None of them were complete.

Perhaps...

that was all identity had ever been.

Fragments.

Quietly carried

by people

who never truly knew us.

The strange thing about distance is that it often has very little to do with how far apart two people stand.

She was close enough that I could have walked over and introduced myself.

One sentence.

One ordinary conversation.

The distance between us could have disappeared before the morning ended.

Yet I never did.

Not because I was afraid.

At least...

that was what I told myself.

The truth was quieter.

Introductions end mysteries.

I wasn't certain

I wanted this one to end.

There is safety in remaining a familiar stranger.

Reality cannot disappoint the version of someone you never truly knew.

Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether the greatest distance between two people

is not silence.

It is imagination.

Because silence leaves room for the heart

to quietly build a world the real one could never hope to become.

And somewhere...

between those ordinary mornings...

I had begun living a little more inside that world than my own.

The Observer

There comes a point where watching the world begins feeling safer than participating in it.

I reached that point long before I realized I had.

Every morning,

I watched people.

The student running because he had overslept.

The couple arguing quietly before pretending nothing had happened.

The old woman smiling at children she had never met.

The birds gathering near the eastern bridge precisely three minutes before sunrise.

Nothing escaped my attention.

At least...

that was what I believed.

One afternoon, while sitting beside the lake,

I watched a little boy chasing pigeons across the pavement.

Every time he came close, they flew away.

Every time they landed, he laughed and ran after them again.

He never caught one.

He never seemed disappointed.

An elderly man sitting nearby smiled.

"They're having fun."

I looked at the birds.

"They don't look like they are."

He laughed softly.

"I wasn't talking about the birds."

For reasons I couldn't explain, that conversation remained with me.

Not because it was profound.

Because I hadn't understood it immediately.

I spent the walk home thinking about it.

The boy wasn't trying to catch the pigeons.

He was simply... running.

The pigeons weren't obstacles.

They were excuses.

Somewhere,

without realizing it,

I had forgotten the difference.

Everything became a destination.

Nothing remained an experience.

Even walking had become a method of arriving.

I thought about my own mornings.

The shortest route.

Always the shortest route.

Not because I enjoyed arriving.

Because I disliked wasting time.

Strange.

I had spent years saving minutes.

I couldn't remember what I had done

with any of them.

That thought unsettled me. I wondered

how many sunsets I had shortened.

How many conversations I had hurried.

How many ordinary moments I had quietly traded for efficiency.

The frightening part was this.

I couldn't remember.

Memory has a peculiar preference.

It rarely preserves the things we weren't truly present for.

Perhaps...

that explained why my memories of her

felt strangely vivid.

Not because extraordinary things had happened.

Because I had actually been there.

For the first time in years, my mind had stopped rushing toward tomorrow long enough to notice today.

She had unknowingly done something I had failed to do for myself.

She had slowed me down.

Not through conversation.

Not through kindness.

Not even through intention.

Simply...

by existing.

I began wondering whether observation

and attention were really the same thing.

I had observed thousands of people.

I remembered almost none of them.

Attention,

however,

left marks.

The old florist beside the bridge.

The child who always stepped around
cracks in the pavement.

The professor who secretly smiled whenever students answered incorrectly but tried anyway.

And her.

Perhaps attention was simply observation

that had remained long enough to become care.

That frightened me.

Because I realized I had spent most of my life observing without ever allowing myself

to care.

It felt safer that way.

Observers cannot be disappointed.

Observers rarely get hurt.

Observers remain outside the story.

Then another thought arrived.

So quietly

I almost missed it.

What if...

I wasn't observing life at all?

What if

I had merely been observing my own thoughts about life?

There is a difference.

One looks outward.

The other never truly leaves the mind.

I suddenly remembered something my mother had once said.

"You think while you're living."

She smiled.

"I think you forget to live

while you're thinking."

At ten,

I had laughed.

At seventeen...

I wasn't sure

she had been joking.

Looking back,

I think that was the first day I truly noticed

how exhausting it is to constantly witness

your own existence.

Not because life was difficult.

Because I was never allowed to simply disappear into it.

Somewhere inside me, there was always another version quietly watching.

Questioning.

Interpreting.

Explaining.

Even now,

as I tell you this story, I sometimes wonder

which one of us is speaking.

The boy who lived it...

Or the one

who never stopped

watching him.

The Weight of Thinking

There are days when the mind becomes louder than the world.

Not because the world grows quieter.

Because thought learns how to imitate reality.

It happened gradually.

Questions no longer waited for silence.

They arrived during lectures.

During walks.

Halfway through conversations.

Even while falling asleep.

My mind had become a place where nothing remained for very long.

Every thought produced another.

Every conclusion became another beginning.

It was exhausting.

Not because thinking is painful.

Because it never seemed to end.

Sometimes I envied ordinary conversations.

People laughed.

Changed the subject.

Forgot what had been said only minutes earlier.

Meanwhile, my own mind returned to sentences weeks after they had been spoken.

Someone would hesitate before answering.

Months later, I was still wondering why.

Perhaps they had forgotten.

I hadn't.

Memory is strange.

It remembers what curiosity refuses to release. I began noticing another habit.

Whenever I solved one question, my mind celebrated for only a moment.

Then quietly asked another.

Like climbing a mountain only to discover

it had merely been hiding a taller one.

I wondered whether answers

had ever truly satisfied me.

Or whether I simply enjoyed searching more than finding.

That thought frightened me.

Because if it were true...

then my question

could disappear tomorrow...

and I still wouldn't know how to stop looking.

One evening,

I sat beside my bedroom window watching the rain.

Not because I enjoyed rain.

Because my thoughts needed something quieter than themselves.

Drops gathered slowly before falling from the edge of the roof.

One.

Then another.

Then another.

I watched them for nearly half an hour.

Eventually,

I realized I hadn't been watching the rain at all.

I had been thinking about watching it.

There it was again.

The observer.

Even peace had become another thing

to analyse.

I closed my eyes.

Nothing changed.

The questions remained.

Where do thoughts go when we stop thinking them?

Who is the one watching the thoughts?

Can the mind observe itself forever? Or does it eventually collapse beneath its own weight?

The strange thing about overthinking is that people imagine it begins with important questions.

It doesn't.

It begins with ordinary ones.

Why did she look away first?

Why do birds always return to the same tree?

Why do I remember certain mornings

more clearly than entire months?

Then...

slowly...

almost politely...

the questions grow larger.

Why am I like this?

Why does consciousness exist?

Why do people continue living

without knowing where they're going?

Why do I keep searching for certainty inside a world that has never once promised it?

By then,

it is already too late.

The mind has discovered that it is capable

of questioning itself.

Nothing becomes heavier than a mirror

reflecting another mirror.

Perhaps... that is why children appear so light.

They look.

They laugh.

They leave.

Adults look.

Think.

Interpret.

Compare.

Remember.

Regret.

We carry every version of ourselves we have ever been.

I carried all of them.

The child

who believed answers solved everything.

The boy

who trusted logic more than feeling.

The observer.

The stranger

who had quietly begun searching for another stranger every morning.

Sometimes,

they all spoke at once.

I wondered whether everyone lived this way. Or whether my own mind had simply forgotten how to become quiet.

There are people who fear darkness.

Others fear heights.

I think my greatest fear was different.

I was afraid that one day my thoughts

would become so convincing...

I would no longer know which parts of my life I had truly lived... and which parts I had merely imagined.

Because imagination is patient.

Given enough time, it quietly begins
wearing the face of memory.

Looking back,

I don't think depression arrived because life became heavier.

I think it arrived because my own mind refused to put anything down.

Every conversation.

Every mistake.

Every possibility.

Every unanswered question.

I carried them all.

Not because they mattered.

Because I believed one of them might finally become the answer.

It never did.

Instead...

they simply became the weight I mistook

for myself.

The Longer Route

Life rarely announces the moments that change it.

We expect thunder.

Great revelations.

Decisions important enough to remember forever.

Reality is considerably quieter.

It happened on a Tuesday.

The eastern bridge was closed.

A notice hung beside the entrance.

Repairs.

Three days.

Students sighed.

Some complained.

Others immediately searched for another way around.

I simply stood there, looking at the sign as though it had personally inconvenienced me.

Four minutes had quietly become seven.

It felt unreasonable.

Strange.

Three extra minutes had somehow become

worth resenting.

Perhaps routine is simply another form

of attachment.

With nowhere else to go, I followed the crowd.

The longer road curved away from the lake,

passing beneath old trees I had somehow never noticed before.

The morning felt different there.

Quieter.

Not because fewer people walked it.

Because nobody seemed to be in quite as much of a hurry.

An old man fed birds beneath an enormous banyan tree.

Two children argued over whose shadow

was longer.

A woman laughed so loudly that three strangers turned around without seeming annoyed.

Somewhere nearby, someone was playing the violin.

Poorly.

Wonderfully.

I remember smiling.

Not because the music was beautiful.

Because it wasn't trying to be.

It simply existed.

For reasons I still struggle to explain,

I felt lighter.

Not happier.

Lighter.

As though something I hadn't realized I was carrying had quietly slipped from my shoulders.

Halfway through the road,

I saw her.

She was walking exactly as she always had.

Books against her chest.

Unhurried.

As though she belonged to this road

in the same way the old trees did.

For a brief moment,

I wondered whether she had always walked this way.

The answer, of course, was obvious.

She had.

I simply hadn't.

That thought remained with me long after the lectures had ended.

How many things had I mistaken

for new... simply because

I had finally slowed down enough to notice them?

The following morning, the bridge remained closed.

I took the longer road again.

This time,

I knew where the violinist usually stood.

Where the children crossed.

Where the old man scattered bread.

Where the sunlight fell through the leaves

just before eight.

The world had not changed.

My pace had.

By the third morning,

I stopped looking at my watch.

There seemed little point.

I was already late by my own definition.

Strangely...

nothing terrible happened.

The lectures still began.

Coffee still tasted the same.

Assignments remained unfinished.

The world continued without rewarding

or punishing my extra three minutes.

That unsettled me.

I had spent years believing efficiency was a virtue.

Now,

I wasn't so certain.

One afternoon,

while walking home,

I noticed something I wish I had noticed years earlier.

People smiled more often on the longer road.

Not dramatically.

Just...

more.

They stopped to greet strangers.

Paused

to watch birds.

Waited

for elderly people crossing the street without checking the time.

No one appeared to be searching for the quickest way through the morning.

Only...

the morning.

Perhaps...

there are places that quietly teach us

how to move.

The shortest road had taught me how to arrive.

The longer one was teaching me how to walk.

I still searched for her.

That much hadn't changed.

But something else had.

For the first time,

she wasn't the only thing

I noticed.

The violin.

The children.

The baker who always waved before
opening his shop.

The dog waiting outside the same house
every single morning.

The leaves that somehow sounded different

when the wind arrived from the west.

Life had begun returning to the spaces

between my thoughts.

Looking back,

I don't think the longer road changed me.

I think it quietly introduced me to the version of myself the shorter road had never allowed me enough time to meet.

Ordinary Things

It is remarkable how much of life exists beneath our attention.

Not because it hides.

Because we hurry.

The longer road had not become familiar yet.

Perhaps that was why everything still introduced itself.

The old man beneath the banyan tree always carried more bread than the birds could possibly eat. Yet every morning, he brought the same amount.

One day, I finally understood why.

The last few pieces were never for the birds.

A small brown dog appeared only after

the pigeons had finished.

The old man smiled.

"So... you've decided to come today."

The dog wagged its tail as though it had been expected.

Perhaps it had.

I smiled.

Not because of the dog.

Because somewhere, a man had quietly made room in his routine for something

that could never thank him.

The violinist continued missing notes.

Children continued applauding anyway.

I wondered which of them understood music better.

There was a flower shop near the end of the road.

Every morning, before arranging a single flower, the owner placed one inside a small glass bottle beside the entrance.

I assumed it was decoration.

One afternoon,

I saw an elderly woman walking home with a cane.

She stopped.

Took the flower.

Smiled toward the empty shop.

Then continued walking.

The owner never came outside.

He already knew.

Some kindnesses become so familiar

they no longer require witnesses.

I began noticing how quietly the world cared for itself.

A boy tying another child's untied shoelaces.

Someone picking up a book a stranger had dropped.

A girl sharing her umbrella with someone

walking in the opposite direction.

None of them looked extraordinary.

Perhaps...

that was exactly what made them beautiful.

I had spent years searching for extraordinary things.

Answers.

Purpose.

Certainty.

Meanwhile...

life had quietly hidden itself inside moments too ordinary to seem important.

One morning,

rain arrived unexpectedly.

People hurried beneath shop roofs.

Others unfolded umbrellas they somehow always seemed to have prepared.

She didn't.

For a brief moment, she simply stood there,

looking upward, before continuing through the rain without appearing particularly bothered by it.

I almost laughed.

Not at her.

With her.

It seemed such an ordinary thing to do.

The rain soaked her books.

She held them tighter.

A few loose strands of hair fell across her face.

She brushed them away exactly as she always did.

Then she disappeared beyond the trees.

Nothing extraordinary happened.

Yet somehow... that ordinary morning remained with me far longer than I expected.

I think

I finally understood why.

The mind remembers what surprises it.

The heart remembers what comforts it.

She had never saved my life.

Never spoken to me.

Never even smiled.

Yet somehow, my mornings had become gentler simply because she continued existing within them.

Perhaps that is all human beings have ever really done for one another.

Not changed the world.

Changed the mornings.

Looking back,

I don't remember which lecture I attended that week.

I don't remember what assignment kept me awake.

I don't remember what I ate or what songs

were playing through my headphones.

I remember

the old man.

The violin.

The flower.

The rain.

The dog.

And her.

Not because they were extraordinary.

Because they weren't.

Perhaps memory has always preferred

ordinary things.

After all...

they are the ones we spend our lives

quietly becoming.

Absence

It began on a Monday.

I reached the old banyan tree a little earlier than usual.

The violinist was already there.

The old man was feeding birds.

The flower still waited inside the small glass bottle.

Everything appeared exactly where it belonged.

Except...

her.

I noticed.

Then continued walking.

Nothing unusual.

People miss mornings.

Oversleep.

Become ill.

Attend different lectures.

Life is remarkably good at providing explanations.

I accepted one.

By Tuesday,

she still wasn't there.

Curious.

Nothing more.

Wednesday.

Thursday.

Friday.

The road continued remembering her.

I did too.

It is remarkable how quickly

absence reorganizes ordinary things.

The space beside the bakery looked larger.

The stretch beneath the maple trees felt strangely unfinished.

Even the silence appeared to be waiting for someone who never arrived.

Of course,

I understood none of this was actually happening.

Roads do not miss people.

Trees remain wonderfully indifferent to human emotion.

The world had not changed.

Only the version I was carrying

inside myself.

That realization should have comforted me.

It didn't.

Instead,

another question arrived.

One I had been quietly avoiding.

If I noticed

her absence...

had I first needed to notice her presence?

The answer was painfully obvious.

Yes.

I had.

Long before

I admitted it.

I told myself it was routine.

Routine dislikes interruption.

Nothing more.

Then Saturday arrived.

She still wasn't there.

I began looking without realizing

I had started.

First, toward the old bridge.

Then, the crossing.

Then, the place beneath the maple trees.

Each morning,

my eyes completed the same journey.

Each morning,

they returned empty.

The strange thing about expectation is that it survives logic remarkably well.

Logic told me she owed me nothing.

She had every right to disappear.

To choose another road.

Another university.

Another life.

Expectation continued looking anyway.

I disliked that.

Not because it was unreasonable.

Because it was honest.

One afternoon,

I caught myself doing something I never thought I would do.

I walked back.

Not home.

Back along the longer road.

As though walking it twice might somehow

produce a different morning.

It didn't.

The violinist had already packed away his instrument.

The flower shop was closing.

Children had gone home.

Only the old man remained,

feeding birds that no longer seemed hungry.

He looked toward me for a brief moment.

"You seem to be searching."

I almost answered.

Instead,

I smiled politely and continued walking.

The frightening thing about silence is not what it hides.

It is what it quietly confirms.

By the following Monday,

I had stopped wondering where she was.

Instead,

I wondered why I still looked.

The question hurt more.

Because I finally knew the answer.

Looking had quietly become part of my morning.

Not because I expected to find her.

Because somewhere...

without asking me...

my heart had already decided where my eyes

belonged first.

There are absences created by distance.

Others, by time.

The quietest ones are created by routine.

Nothing is taken away.

Nothing is destroyed.

One ordinary thing simply fails to arrive.

And suddenly...

an entire morning no longer resembles itself.

Perhaps...

that is how we discover what has become

part of us.

Not when it appears.

When it doesn't.

The following morning,

I reached the old banyan tree.

The violin began.

The birds gathered.

The flower waited.

And there...

walking exactly as though she had never left... was Z.

For a brief moment,

I simply watched.

Then...

without meaning to... I smiled.

She never noticed.

I was grateful she didn't.

Because the smile had never been for her.

It was for the realization I had spent
an entire week trying not to understand.
Somewhere...
between ordinary mornings...
without conversation...
without memory...
without permission...
someone had quietly become
part of my life.

Waiting

There comes a point where the heart grows tired of defending itself.

Mine arrived quietly.

Without permission.

Without announcement.

I stopped asking whether I should look.

I already knew I would.

The question had changed.

Not...

"Will she be there?"

But...

"Why do I still hope she is?"

For weeks,

I searched for another explanation.

Routine.

Curiosity.

Pattern recognition.

Habit.

None of them survived very long.

Eventually,

I grew tired of inventing new names

for the same feeling.

One morning,

before leaving home,

I looked at my wrist.

D.

The question remained.

As it always had.

Then, almost instinctively,

my eyes moved toward the window.

The morning was still there.

Somehow...

I already knew which part of it

I would search first.

I smiled.

Not because I expected to find her.

Because I had finally stopped pretending

I wasn't looking.

Strange.

Honesty felt lighter than explanation.

The longer road had become my road now.

Not because it was longer.

Because somewhere along the way, it had quietly become home.

The violinist still missed notes.

The children still laughed at exactly the wrong moments.

The old man still carried too much bread.

The dog still arrived fashionably late.

And sometimes...

she was there.

Sometimes...

she wasn't.

The morning remained beautiful

either way.

That surprised me.

Months earlier,

her absence had emptied the road.

Now... it merely changed it.

There is a difference.

I think that was the first sign

I was healing.

Not because I needed her less.

Because I had finally allowed the world

to become larger than my longing.

She was no longer the entire morning.

She had simply become one beautiful part

of it.

I never counted how many times our eyes met.

That seemed unfair.

Some moments become smaller

the moment we begin measuring them.

Instead,

I simply let them happen.

A glance.

A passing morning.

Another ordinary day.

Then life

continued.

Perhaps that was enough.

People often mistake waiting for expectation.

I don't think they are the same.

Expectation asks the future to become different.

Waiting... quietly learns how to live

with today.

That realization changed something inside me.

I was no longer waiting for a conversation.

Or a confession. Or some impossible future

my own imagination had quietly constructed.

I was simply...

waiting within my own life.

If tomorrow she appeared, the morning

would become a little gentler.

If she didn't, the violin would still play.

The birds would still gather.

Children would still argue over shadows.

The old man would still save the last pieces of bread for the dog.

Life,

I realized,

had never asked me to choose between loving one person and loving the world.

Somehow...

one had quietly taught me the other.

Looking back,

I think that frightened me more than anything else.

Not because I had fallen for someone

who never knew me.

Because I had finally understood that my heart had never been waiting for her.

It had been waiting for itself.

For permission to care.

To notice.

To stop searching for reasons before allowing itself to feel.

She had never given me that permission.

She had simply walked the same road long enough for me to realize I had been the one withholding it all along.

And so, every morning, I still looked.

Not because I believed the world owed me anything.

But because there are some things the heart continues doing long after the mind has stopped asking why.

A Lifetime

There is something I have hidden from you.

Not intentionally.

Perhaps...

I simply wasn't ready to say it aloud.

For seventeen years,

I carried the same question upon my wrist.

I looked at it every morning.

Every night.

Every birthday.

Every time I convinced myself I was
somehow closer than before.

It never changed.

Neither did I.

At least...

that was what I believed.

The words were simple.

Painfully simple.

What are you seeking?

Nothing more.

Nothing less.

I hated that question.

Not because it was difficult.

Because it refused to become specific.

Seeking what?

Knowledge?

Love?

Peace?

Meaning?

My own mind?

How could anyone answer a question

that first demanded another question?

Children carried questions like riddles.

Mine felt like a mirror.

Every answer I offered it quietly became another reflection of myself.

Perhaps...

that was why it remained.

Because I kept changing the thing

I believed I was searching for.

Looking back,

I think my question had never asked where
I was going.

It was asking

why

I couldn't stop.

Home

There are moments so ordinary that
memory forgets to keep them.

I think the answer was one of them.

People always imagined questions
disappearing like lightning.

A revelation.

A single conversation.

One perfect understanding large enough to
divide life into before and after.

Mine never arrived.

Life continued.

Morning after morning.

Rain.

Sunlight.

Examinations.

Coffee.

The longer road.

The violin.

The birds.

The flower.

The old man.

Sometimes...

Z.

Sometimes...

not.

The years kept walking.

So did I.

One morning, while leaving home, my eyes

did what they had always done.

They looked toward my wrist.

Then... they stopped.

The question was gone.

Only one thing remained.

D.

I stared at it for a long time.

Not because I was surprised.

Because I couldn't remember when it had happened.

Yesterday?

Last week?

Months ago?

I searched my memory.

Nothing.

No revelation.

No perfect morning.

No final answer.

Only life.

Quietly continuing while I had been busy living it.

I smiled.

Not because I had finally found the answer.

Because I finally understood why I never had.

Questions are remarkable things.

We believe they exist to be answered.

Perhaps... some of them exist only to change the person carrying them.

I looked once more at the empty space beneath my letter.

Then,

almost instinctively,

I began walking.

The familiar intersection appeared exactly where it always had.

Two signs stood quietly beneath the morning light.

University

Shortest Route

4 Minutes

Beside it, another.

University

Longer Route

7 Minutes

For seventeen years,

I had believed the shortest road

was the intelligent one.

Today, for the first time,

it looked... lonely.

I turned toward the longer road.

The old man was already feeding birds.

The violinist missed the same note he had been missing for years.

Children argued about shadows.

The dog arrived late.

The flower waited inside the little glass bottle.

And somewhere

further ahead...

Z

continued walking through her own ordinary morning.

She never turned around.

She never knew who I was.

Perhaps,

to her,

I had always remained the quiet boy who happened to take the same road.

Some stories would call that tragic.

I don't.

Because somewhere between searching for answers... and searching for her... I had quietly found something far more difficult to discover.

A way to finally walk beside life... instead of ahead of it.

The mind seeks the shortest route to certainty.

Life quietly chooses the longest route to understanding.

Without realizing it... I had already walked all the way home.

Take the longest route...

if it makes you happy.